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The Grimaldi Shakespeare

Schoch, R. (2012). The Grimaldi Shakespeare. *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 30(1), 17-35.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/shb.2012.0014>

Published in:
Shakespeare Bulletin

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

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The Grimaldi Shakspere

RICHARD SCHOCH

This essay is about the relationship between two fake editions of Shakespeare, both concocted in the mid-nineteenth century. One is extremely well known to Shakespeareans while the other has remained virtually unexamined. The familiar edition is, of course, the so-called “Perkins Folio” fraudulently annotated by John Payne Collier in the early 1850s, whose little-known counterpart is *The Grimaldi Shakspere* (1853), an anonymous work purporting to be an account of a Second Folio annotated by the famous stage clown Joey Grimaldi (1778–1837). While it has been long recognized that *The Grimaldi Shakspere* was a timely satire of Collier’s claims for the authenticity and authority of the Perkins Folio, the parody’s deeper critical strategies and inventive coupling of theatrical and editorial perspectives have passed unnoticed by later generations of scholars, who have typically regarded it as no more than a humorous footnote to the Collier controversy.¹ I want to take seriously a text that, on the few occasions it has been discussed, has been treated as a harmless and entertaining joke.

In this essay, the first sustained investigation of *The Grimaldi Shakspere*, I will argue that, far from gently mocking Collier, the text actually leveled the first charge of forgery against him, and therefore must be regarded as a signal document in the history of that controversy. More broadly, though, I will argue that the parody’s strategy of undertaking literary criticism in the guise of stage practice—ie, turning a pantomime clown into an editor of Shakespeare—invites us to reconsider the presumed binary relationship between dramatic criticism and theatrical performance. To build this argument I have structured the essay in three parts: a summary of the Collier episode; an account of *The Grimaldi Shakspere*; and a fresh archival-based inquiry into its authorship. After moving through these stages I conclude with an appraisal of how theatrical practice can itself become literary criticism.

I

On January 31st and February 7th 1852, an article by Collier appeared in the *Athenaeum* under a title guaranteed to arouse the jealous interest of Shakespeareans and bibliophiles: “Early Manuscript Emendations of Shakespeare’s Text.” The retired scholar told a remarkable story whose veracity he insisted upon even as, in the years ahead, the evidence pointing to its falsehood grew overwhelming and conclusive. Collier claimed that in the spring of 1849 he had purchased from the London bookseller Thomas Rodd, since dead, a battered, beer-stained, and slightly defective Second Folio.² Upon finding that the copy was imperfect he “put the book away in a closet” and forgot about it. Yet when re-examining the work sometime in 1852 Collier noticed something that had earlier escaped his (and, so it would seem, Rodd’s) attention: “from the first page to the last, it contains notes and emendations in a hand-writing not much later than the time when it came from the press.”³

The outer cover was inscribed “Thos. Perkins | his Booke” in a hand seemingly of the mid-seventeenth century.⁴ This inscription gave this volume its name—the “Perkins Folio”—and its annotator was dubbed “the old corrector.” Now in the Huntington Library, the work is treasured not because of its editorial authority but because it remains one of the greatest hoaxes perpetrated in the history of English literature. The annotator was, of course, Collier himself. Alert, as we now are, to the rapacious extent of his forgeries we could not fail today to recognize that the Perkins Folio was a fraud and that the “old corrector” was the old scholar himself.⁵ Reactions at the time, however, were more forgiving: Collier might have been hoodwinked, it was believed, but would not have masterminded the deception himself.

Collier published seventeen emendations in the *Athenaeum*, with nine more revealed in *Notes and Queries* between March and November 1852. Hundreds more conjectural readings were published the following year in his *Notes and Emendations to the Text of Shakespeare’s Plays*, but even that amounted to no more than a scattering. Running to over five hundred pages, *Notes and Emendations* followed the Folio order of the plays and gave for each one a substantial number of indicative corrections. As Collier explained in the preface, the nine hundred pages of the Perkins Folio contained 20,000 corrections (“there is no page without from ten to thirty of these minor emendations”) many of which, as he duly noted, had already been introduced in the major eighteenth-century editions and commentaries. More substantial emendations, “where letters are added

or expunged, where words are supplied or struck out, or where lines and sentences, omitted by the earlier printer, have been inserted," numbered about one thousand.⁶

Surprisingly, the Perkins Folio featured extensive theatrical editing—stage business—going well beyond altering or supplying act and scene numbers. "Many passages," Collier observed, were "struck out with a pen, as if for the purpose of shortening the performance," while "hundreds of stage-directions" had been inserted "as if for the guidance and instruction of actors." Thus, in *The Tempest*, alongside the Folio stage direction "*Here Prospero discovers Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess*," the "manuscript-corrector . . . add[ed] a note . . . *Draw curtain*; so that Prospero drew a traverse at the back of the stage, and showed Ferdinand and Miranda at their game."⁷ This strong, if less than revelatory, gesture towards what we would now call a performance text led Collier to conclude that "the volume once belonged to a person interested in, or connected with, one of our early theatre."⁸ Indeed he speculated that Thomas Perkins was related to the actor Richard Perkins (d. 1650), and thus someone likely to have witnessed Shakespeare's plays in performance and to "have been connected with one of our old play-houses." Collier even proposed that the Perkins Folio was based upon original "prompt-books," and therefore represented not the subjective preferences of the annotator but "the restored language of Shakespeare."⁹

Because this astounding claim was based primarily upon withheld evidence—no one was permitted to inspect the Perkins Folio—it was inevitable that Collier's judgment was questioned: first in major literary journals and eventually in more elaborate critiques written by the prominent Shakespeare scholars Samuel Weller Singer, James Orchard Halliwell, and Alexander Dyce. In April 1853 Collier complained in the *Athenaeum* that "five—or, as some say, six—gentlemen (including editors and would-be editors) . . . are vehemently whetting their knives to cut me up for a carbonado."¹⁰ Within weeks two critical studies appeared: Singer's *The Text of Shakespeare Vindicated* and Dyce's *A Few Notes on Shakespeare*.¹¹ As the decade wore on, the number of publications dispensing praise or blame on the subject increased exponentially, resulting in nearly twenty complete monographs. Most observers continued to maintain, at least in public, that Collier was the victim, not the perpetrator, of any hoax.¹²

The tide turned irrevocably against Collier at the end of the decade, when long-deferred inspection of the Perkins Folio finally demonstrated his guilt. Shortly after claiming to have discovered the annotated volume Collier presented it to his patron, the Duke of Devonshire, in whose

Chatsworth House library it was safely lodged. But in 1859 the Duke's heir acceded to a request from Sir Frederic Madden that the volume be examined by his specialist colleagues at the British Museum. Nearly seven years after the "discovery" of the Perkins Folio, Nicholas E. S. A. Hamilton, Assistant Keeper of Manuscripts, declared in a letter to *The Times* that the annotations were nineteenth-century forgeries, not seventeenth-century originals. The detection of matching pencil marks in a modern hand underneath and alongside the inked annotations reinforced the likelihood of forgery, with the unavoidable implication that Collier was the forger. As Madden confessed in his diary a few weeks prior, "I am really fearful that we must come to the astounding conclusion that Mr. C. is himself the fabricator of the notes!"¹³

Hamilton's full findings were made public in his *Inquiry into the Genuineness of the Manuscript Corrections in Mr. J. Payne Collier's Annotated Shakspeare Folio, 1632* (1860), in which he accused Collier of a "series of systematic forgeries," of which the Perkins Folio and its "worthless counterfeits of the nineteenth [century]" was but a single shameful instance.¹⁴ The final salvo came from Clement Mansfield Ingleby, whose *A Complete View of the Shakspeare Controversy* (1861) summarized the vast evidence against Collier and accused him outright of forgery. "Of all the offences with which Mr. Collier stands charged," Ingleby raged, "the fabrication of the Perkins notes is the worst. Shame to the perpetrator of that foul libel on the pure genius of Shakspeare!"¹⁵ In the face of bald accusation, Collier's unaccustomed silence, and that of his most loyal defenders, pronounced him guilty of the greatest Shakespeare forgery since William Henry Ireland.

II

Announced in the *Literary Gazette* on 2 July 1853, and published a month later, *The Grimaldi Shakspeare* was an anonymous illustrated satire on Collier's *Notes and Emendations*.¹⁶ Trading on timeliness, as did the best Victorian parodies, it appeared before public judgment came down categorically against either the Perkins Folio (of the full-length critiques, only Singer's had been published) or Collier personally. Accusations and evidence of deliberate fraud were some years away. Nevertheless, the sixteen-page text cast more doubt at the time upon Collier's discovery than did most mainstream literary critics, demonstrating parody's ability to convey shrewd insights under comedy's disarming guise. In a stingingly

precise mockery of Collier's claims, *The Grimaldi Shakspeare* announces the discovery in an Islington secondhand bookstall of a "grim old folio, a mere bundle of dirty leaves, without a beginning or end."¹⁷ Illiterate and unknowing, the stall-keeper priced the volume at 2s. 6d. because "it's a biggish book." The unnamed purchaser, however, instantly recognizes it as a Shakespeare folio annotated in 1816 by the great Regency theatrical clown Joey Grimaldi, once a resident of nearby Exmouth Market and for four decades the leading attraction at nearby Sadler's Wells.

Reproduced in facsimile is the autograph inscription "Joseph Grimaldi, his book. Here we are!" Theatregoers of the time would have recalled that when Grimaldi played Clown in a harlequinade his entrance line was "Here we are again!," a phrase so popular that it survived in performances of later generations of pantomime clowns. Hitherto unknown for his devotion to the Bard, the beloved "Joey" rises to the status of "Joseph Grimaldi, Esq., Comedian" in recognition of the sagacity of his "Notes and Emendations on the plays of Shakspeare." Several of Grimaldi's most suggestive manuscript emendations are also reproduced in facsimile. Needless to say, the Grimaldi Folio purports to exhibit "new and original readings . . . so singularly correct . . . so obviously proper, that they have only to be promulgated to be received and welcomed by all."¹⁸

The Grimaldi Shakspeare blatantly ridicules Collier's short-lived and ludicrous assertion of copyright in England over the Perkins annotations. If legally binding, and if the Perkins annotations were regarded by scholars as normative, then such copyright would place in Collier's hands total control over who could publish authoritative editions of the plays, thus making him the single most powerful person in the history of Shakespeare editing. In a comic parallel, the "great Joe" outrageously asserts that

No future edition of Shakspeare can ever dare to appear without all these editions and corrections; and as they are all copyright, and may not be used by any one but me, it follows that the Bard is in future my private property, and all other editors are hereby "warned off;" but it is not very likely such misguided laborers will appear after this warning; if they do, they will be stigmatized as all such "trespassers," deserve.¹⁹

Like Collier's mainstream critics, the parodist observes that many of the Perkins emendations anticipate those adopted by eighteenth-century Shakespeare editors, but unlike some of them he does not become suspicious. If Thomas Perkins uncannily foreshadowed Steevens and Malone then it was simply because he was "a Scotsman," and thus "possessed the

power of 'second sight,' looking into futurity so wondrously that he wrote with his own hand emendations in the text of his folio which were first invented by the scholars of the succeeding century."²⁰

As for the authority of the Perkins emendations, Collier's belief that they represented the "restored" language of Shakespeare is lampooned through exaggerated reverence shown to the Grimaldi emendations. Here, for example, is the explanation behind the clown's stunning resolution of a previously overlooked crux in *Richard III*. The parodist writes:

There is a passage in *Richard III*. which has hitherto been received as the genuine reading. The 'First Gent.' says to Gloucester when he stops the funeral cortege of Henry VI.

'My lord, stand back, and let the coffin pass.'

A few moments consideration will show that this cannot be a correctly expressed line. Coffins are denied volition, and he must have used other words to make his meaning clear—such as 'let the *bearers* pass'—but we are fortunately saved all conjecture, by the true reading appearing in our Grimaldi folio of 1816, by which it appears the entire line as it generally stands is a printer's error. The line of type has dropped out in moving the form (no uncommon occurrence in a printing office) and the ignorant mechanic in trying to repair his fault has made it what it is. This is what it should be:

'My lord, stand back and let the parson cough.'

This new reading fortunately requires no defensive arguments when we remember that the clergyman had been walking bareheaded and slowly through the streets of London; and that common politeness required the 'First Gent.' to save Gloucester, also a gentleman, from an unguarded approximation to his explosive lungs.²¹

Grimaldi's annotation makes a clear line obscure rather than an obscure line clear, thus mocking the unnecessary and implausible Perkins emendations. Note, too, the sly reference to the vapid "common sense" standard that Collier invoked (Shakespeare "was emphatically the poet of common sense; and to the verdict of common sense I am willing to submit") when he could adduce neither philological nor contextual evidence to support a given emendation.²² In a further jibe at the originality of the Perkin's annotations, the Grimaldi annotation is not a "gag" of the parodist's invention but drawn from the common stock of theatrical humor.

By the 1850s an established green room tale was that of a hapless actor who bungled his only line in a performance of *Richard III*, saying “let the parson cough” instead of “let the coffin pass.”²³

Amusing emendations that require little explanation include “drawn by a team of little attornies” (instead of “atomies”) in the Queen Mab speech from *Romeo and Juliet* and “the rump and onion fries” (instead of “the rump-fed ronyon cries”) from the witches in *Macbeth*.²⁴ Interpolated stage directions in the Perkins Folio are satirized through Grimaldi’s nonsensical instructions, such as the stage rigging required for the sudden appearance in of Macbeth’s imaginary dagger. As the parodist explains in his gloss on the note “Dagger hanging, O.P.,” Grimaldi recommended that an actual dagger “be suspended above Macbeth” so that audiences “will never more be offended by staring at vacancy,” and wonder why Banquo’s ghost alone should be visible when both the dagger and the ghost were hallucinations.²⁵ Making much of Gertrude’s exclamation in the fencing scene that “[o]ur son is fat and scant of breath,” Grimaldi insists that Hamlet should be played as if he were Falstaff, complete with “stuffing,” thus transforming tragedy into comedy.²⁶ Throughout, the parodist shows not only deep suspicion of the Perkins emendations but solid knowledge of editorial and theatrical traditions, augmented by a keen appetite for mockery, such that the authority of Collier’s *Notes and Emendations* is undermined at every turn in the pointed absurdity of the Grimaldi annotations. It is precisely this union of editorial acumen and embodied theatrical knowledge that gives the text power and significance beyond its immediate context.

Given parody’s widespread appeal throughout the Victorian era it comes as no surprise that *The Grimaldi Shakspeare* was reviewed favorably. What is surprising, however, is that the *Athenaeum*, the journal most loyal to Collier, printed a lengthy and positive review. Peter Cunningham, the Shakespeare editor and literary antiquarian, described the satire as creating “a little harmless momentary mirth,” adding that “if Mr. Collier should see occasion to look into it, [it will] afford him a laugh.”²⁷ Yet if *The Grimaldi Shakspeare* yielded only “momentary mirth,” then why did the *Athenaeum* sacrifice four full columns to appraise it? And if it was nothing more than a trifling “squib,” then why was its humor sanctioned in long approving quotations? After all, the journal was itself lampooned for defending Collier by attacking his critics, such that the parodist calls it the “Fourpenny Exterminator.” If anything, the *Athenaeum* had cause to ignore—to denounce—this mockery of Collier and his Shakespeare discovery. By responding to *The Grimaldi Shakspeare* with a hearty laugh,

the *Athenaeum* signaled that it was not bothered: “there is no harm in all this jesting, and some fun.”²⁸ Embracing the parody would neutralize it whereas an overt attack would lend it credibility in as much as only legitimate criticisms were worth refuting.

The Athenaeum would never have endorsed a work that cast serious doubt upon either the authority of the Perkins Folio or the discernment of the man who discovered it. Indeed, Cunningham carefully explained that appreciation of skillful satire implies no lack of respect for Collier:

There is no subject, however serious, which will not lend itself to a squib; and if the subject have a truth and value of its own, and the squib be good, *they do no harm to one another*. We can enjoy the jest without the least impeachment of our respect for the theme. (emphasis added)

But like the return of the repressed, awareness of real harm crept into the review when Cunningham warned that “a squib against Mr. Collier is a squib against all the Shakespeare commentators from Steevens down to Knight and Halliwell” and that the scholar’s “honest attempt to render good service to Shakspeare” could never be invalidated by mere parody.²⁹

The Grimaldi Shakspeare looks sharply back to John Poole’s *Hamlet Travestie* (1801), whose most winning aspect, as its original critics affirmed, was not the mock-tragedy itself (a bland paraphrase of the original) but richly comic versions of the notes and emendations provided by Johnson, Steevens, Malone, and others in their monumental editions of Shakespeare—the very editions which Collier ransacked in perpetrating his hoax. The faux-scholarly apparatus purported to define obscure words, reconcile contradictions between folio and quarto texts, and establish Shakespeare’s sources. Poole asserted that his parody of Shakespeare criticism required neither “apology” nor “extenuation” because all admirers of the Bard—and who, he presumed, would read the burlesque *but* such admirers—must feel “indignant at finding [Shakespeare’s] sense perverted and his meaning obscured, by the false lights, and the fanciful and arbitrary illustrations of Black-letter Critics and Honey-Catching Commentators.”³⁰ On behalf of those still devoted to Shakespearean purity, Poole undertook to out-Herod Herod, declaring that “it had been well if some able satirist had exposed and punished their folly, their affectation, and their arrogance.”³¹ In similar spirit, another “able satirist” emerged four decades later to expose the folly, affectation, and arrogance of John Payne Collier, heir to the critical tradition that Johnson, Steevens, and Malone pioneered. Even the conceit that a pantomime clown should be a gifted literary critic drew upon the popularity in the Victorian era of

theatrical parodies of Shakespeare in which low comic characters assumed the dignity of tragic heroes.³²

Context, then, explains why criticism of Collier took the form of theatrically inflected parody. But the distinctiveness of the parody was that it understood far better than literary critics at the time what was disturbing about the Perkins Folio. The parody, because it was a parody, and thus seemingly trivial, was able to make the most damning public case against Collier in the summer of 1853. That case rested partly upon the figure of Grimaldi himself and partly upon some necessarily veiled textual references that only a select handful of readers at the time would have understood. Moreover, the mixture of theatrical knowledge and literary criticism in *The Grimaldi Shakspeare* invites speculation as to the identities of both the author and the targeted “knowing” audience of Shakespearean insiders.

For the purposes of ridiculing Collier and the Perkins Folio it would be difficult to imagine a happier strategy than a comparison with Joey Grimaldi and his fictive annotated folio. Grimaldi died in 1837 and had stopped performing a decade earlier, but his name lived on, so that *The Grimaldi Shakspeare* serves as an emblem of comic irrationality, the antithesis of learned literary exegesis.³³ It was fully consistent, then, with the inversion of “high” and “low” in Victorian parodies that a beloved pantomime clown should be lauded as a Shakespearean critic of the highest degree, superior in his “true sympathetic genius” to Collier himself.³⁴

In every way Grimaldi was Collier’s polar opposite. The former was a barely-schooled clown who, although a popular icon in his day, died an impoverished cripple, while the latter thrived as a scholar who spent his days in communion with other literary elites. The controlling hand of Charles Dickens bore primary responsibility for *The Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi* (1838), a text written in the third person. Tellingly, the name “Shakespeare” does not appear on any of the nearly 600 pages of that two-volume work. In all Grimaldi’s years at Drury Lane, and for all his association with actor-managers like John Philip Kemble, he never came close to a Shakespearean role, not even a gravedigger in *Hamlet*, a part traditionally acted by clowns.³⁵

Moreover, the eloquence of Grimaldi the performer derived from his gestures and physical expression.³⁶ His text was not the printed script but his own body: “every limb of him had a language,” as one critic put it.³⁷ When he did speak on stage it was usually in comic patter songs, with lyrics “utterly destitute of humour and music” and “entirely guiltless of merit,” one London critic recollected.³⁸ How fittingly preposterous, then,

that the stage buffoon who in life gave meaning to the doggerel verses "Tippety Witchet" and "Hot Codlins" was revered posthumously for his deep understanding of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Richard III*.³⁹ How ironic that a man who was largely a stranger to words on the stage should become an expert on words in print.

The very shape of Grimaldi's performances, with their extreme physicality, provided additional commentary upon Collier and his defense of the Perkins Folio. Grimaldi was famous for his "supple limbs and droll contortions of physiognomy," recalled one American reviewer of *The Grimaldi Shakspeare*.⁴⁰ The pantomime clown's "twisting" and "contortions"—"now lateral, now upwards, now downwards"—invite the reader to regard Collier as a literary contortionist, who through the Perkins emendations deformed and mangled Shakespeare's text.⁴¹ Far from restoring Shakespeare's language, as Collier professed, the parody accuses him of willfully distorting that language. This image of Collier twisting and warping the Shakespearean text is precisely what Halliwell had in mind when he decried the elder scholar's "taste" for "violent alterations in the text, in passages that mostly require only a little attention to be perfectly intelligible as they stand in the original."⁴² Comparisons between theatrical and literary contortionists were apt enough, but with one important difference. When Grimaldi twisted, bended, and collapsed his body, the audiences at Drury Lane and Sadler's Wells cheered. When Collier forced his chosen meaning onto a line of Shakespeare, the effect, so the parodist would have it, was not antic pleasure but shock and disgust at abuse inflicted upon a revered text.

III

Thus far I have been excavating the substructure of *The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, revealing a foundation of contexts, associations, and possibilities for seeing how this comic text is much more central to the Collier controversy than it appears. The last step in that endeavor involves trying to identify the parody's author, which has never been conclusively established.

In his *Athenaeum* review Cunningham discounted the rumor that "a well-known wit, and his friend, a distinguished editor of Shakespeare's works" were responsible for *The Grimaldi Shakspeare*.⁴³ Likely he was referring to the illustrator and comic writer F.W. Fairholt and James Orchard Halliwell. Frederic Madden of the British Museum believed that Fairholt was involved and Halliwell's participation was suggested by a letter to him from W.O. Hunt referring to "your Grimaldi Notes and

Emendations . . . [which] caused me such a hearty laugh as I have not indulged in for a long while."⁴⁴ The coupling made sense: the illustrator ran a specialty line in facsimiles and tracings of old manuscripts while the Shakespeare critic had voiced some of the earliest reservations about the Perkins Folio.⁴⁵ Fairholt provided the illustrations for Halliwell's 1853 Shakespeare edition, so there was a timely pattern of collaboration. It could have been that in preparing *The Grimaldi Shakspeare* Fairholt supplied the illustrations and some of the theatrically inspired gags while Halliwell concocted the mock-emendations. The problem, however, is that Halliwell did not dismiss the entire Perkins Folio outright, but, like other critics at the time, accepted some of its emendations. Moreover, nowhere in a vast body of criticism and correspondence does the scholar display a winning sense of humor.⁴⁶

Solving the authorship riddle might start with the observation that beginning in 1853 Collier was subjected in *Notes and Queries* to ever more agitated commentaries upon the Perkins Folio from a young literary enthusiast in Leeds, who signed himself "A.E.B." Andrew Edmund Brae, to give the correspondent his full name, expressed such hostility towards the Perkins annotations that his vitriol extended to Collier personally. The scholar was blamed for forcing upon the public with "an uncompromising claim to authority" what amounted, Brae believed, to no more than "a few drops of rusty ink fashioned into letters of formal cut," whose origins no one could trace.⁴⁷ Hinting sarcastically at the fraudulence of the annotations, he remarked how "startling" it was that a seventeenth-century annotator "suspects every passage" that later annotators also suspected, and how "invariably" both parties arrived at the same reading of each disputed passage.⁴⁸

Brae was also corresponding with Ingleby, who a few years later would demolish Collier's reputation. Brae's private letters reveal suspicions far stronger than those expressed publicly. "I declare *war to the knife* against Mr. Collier's folio," he vowed in early May 1853. "From its first announcement in 1852 I have continued to be more and more convinced of its being an enormous *manufactured humbug*—at present wrapped in mystery but sure of being brought to light some day or other."⁴⁹ Brae's closeted attacks upon Collier edged toward accusations of deceit; but even in private he would not reveal the full extent of his concern:

[Collier] can never wash out the stain from his name of having, to use the mildest phrase, so *foolishly* abetted so very trumpery a deception—I shall not give utterance to all my surmises about this folio. I shall not hazard a

guess as to its fabrications, but I have strange suspicions—the sign of the beast is very apparent.⁵⁰

The more Brae studied the Perkins emendations the more he became convinced not that a foolish Collier had been deceived but that a dastardly Collier had lied. Such dark thoughts, intimated months after the publication of *Notes and Emendations*, represent an unusually early instance of statements tantamount to allegations of forgery. It would be several years before the same was alleged publicly.

Just when Brae started to believe that Collier was behind the hoax he faced a publication embargo from the main forum for debate on the Perkins Folio. Despite his obligation to act impartially, the editor of *Notes and Queries*, William John Thoms, would not permit the character of his friend Collier to be sullied week after week. In July 1853, citing “the sharp and somewhat personal tone of several of the recent contributions,” he announced that he would not print submissions deemed inflammatory or unbecoming a gentleman.⁵¹

Determined to prove that the annotations were modern forgeries, Brae had been secretly searching for a test-word—a word used anachronistically in the emendations, thus proving that they dated not from the mid-seventeenth century but were of more recent origin. “I do not despair,” Brae disclosed to Ingleby in late August 1853, “and I now have a test-word *under investigation*.”⁵² Brae disclosed his linguistic experiment to Thoms, hoping to persuade the editor to print the result because it would be grounded not in heated invective but calm disinterested fact. As Brae explained, the appearance in the Perkins emendations of a word that did not exist prior to 1750 “must convict the whole affair of illicit fabrication.”⁵³ Days later he revealed to Thoms that the “test word” was *cheer*. The modern sense of the word, meaning a shout of approbation, dated from the early nineteenth century, Brae explained, and yet the word was used in its modern sense in one of the Perkins emendations for *Coriolanus*: “And power, unto itself most commendable,/ Hath not a tomb so evident as a cheer.”⁵⁴ “[C]heer” replaced the presumed corruption “chair.” For Brae, this “glaring and damning anachronism” pointed to a single inescapable conclusion: the manuscript annotations in their entirety were a modern forgery.⁵⁵

Refusing to sanction what he regarded as literary entrapment, Thoms printed no reference to the test word. “It is one matter to differ with Mr Collier on questions of literary criticism,” he told Brae, “& another to charge him with being a party to a gross imposture.” Collier, his “very dear

friend" and "a man of unimpeachable character," was "utterly incapable of participating in anything so gross, as the putting forth as genuine a series of modern fabrications."⁵⁶ Time would reveal just how poor a judge of character Thoms was. For the moment, though, it was Brae whose judgment was questioned. The "test word" from *Coriolanus* was not published and thus not publicly known. Nor does it seem that Brae shared it with anyone other than Thoms and Ingleby.⁵⁷ Defeated, he gave up trying to make his case.⁵⁸

Yet the test word did appear in print in the summer of 1853, only it was not remarked upon at the time or in subsequent accounts of the Collier controversy. It appeared in *The Grimaldi Shakspeare*. As the parodist would have it, Grimaldi was much interested in how to stage the moment in the closet scene when Hamlet is surprised by the re-appearance of his father's ghost. In the margin he added an indispensable instruction to all future Hamlets: "chuk over the cheer." Reproduced in facsimile, the mock stage direction was glossed as "throw the chair down." Hamlet's abrupt overturning of the chair, the parodist elaborates, produces a "startling effect upon the audience."⁵⁹ The irregular spelling of "chair" as "cheer" was phonetic, because Grimaldi was likely to have pronounced the word in that rustic manner.

This is a swipe at how the Perkins Folio regularly anticipates the readings of later Shakespeare editors, because Hamlet kicking over the chair provided the frontispiece for Nicholas Rowe's 1709 edition, an image which later editors, including Steevens, believed was derived from Restoration stage practice. In *The Grimaldi Shakspeare* the parodist slyly acknowledges the doubtfulness of that claim by offering one more exaggerated still: that the business with the chair "was handed down from the time of the dramatist himself."⁶⁰ That comment also ridicules Collier's assertion that the Perkins emendations were based upon lost prompt copies of Shakespeare's plays.

More pointedly, though, this deliberate coupling of "chair" and "cheer" quietly reveals the "test-word" that Brae developed in the summer of 1853—and therefore makes *The Grimaldi Shakspeare* a hitherto unrecognized strong and early indictment of the Perkins Folio and Collier himself. The parody gives voice to the "strange suspicions" and unuttered "surmises" that Brae only hinted at in his private correspondence. Here, in a seemingly harmless text, for those capable of recognizing it, was covert warning that proof of deception existed. The sign was too subtle for most readers to recognize it, but that was the point: it was not meant for most readers. It was meant for the handful of literary enthusiasts who knew,

or were about to know, that the pseudo-antique Perkins annotations betrayed their modern origin. And it was meant for Collier himself. Follow the path of the words—"cheer" replacing "chair," just as Thomas Perkins allegedly proposed—and it would lead to the conclusion that the folio was a fraud and Collier the likely charlatan.

In *The Grimaldi Shakspeare's* playful last joke, the parodist assigns a different letter to each point of the "H"-shaped wound sustained by Scarus in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, such that the letters spell "H-U-M-B-U-G." This performance-oriented gag stands as the limit of what at the time could be said overtly about the doubtful authenticity of the Perkins Folio. We should remember Brae's letter to Ingleby from May 1853, dismissing "Mr. Collier's folio" as "*manufactured humbug*—at present wrapped in mystery but sure of being brought to light some day or other."⁶¹ Grimaldi's stage business of the overturned chair in *Hamlet* is that mystery brought to light. "Hitherto I have only attacked indirectly by a side wind," Brae further confided to Ingleby at the very moment when *The Grimaldi Shakspeare* was being written; "[but] I shall now attack more openly."⁶²

It is possible that Brae wrote *The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, for he possessed motive, means, and opportunity. His motive was to challenge Collier in print after finding himself barred from *Notes and Queries*; his means was the test-word itself; and his opportunity was his place in the literary world. But there is no conclusive proof that he was the author. Ultimately, though, it little matters whether Brae had a direct hand in *The Grimaldi Shakspeare*. What matters is that the critical stance he took privately in the spring and summer of 1853—a stance that no one dared take publicly—appears, however veiled, in that seemingly trivial sixteen-page comic pamphlet. What matters is not the identity of the author but the power of the text.

Literary criticism frequently informs theatrical practice, as when Henry Irving based his performance of Macbeth upon an article from the *Westminster Review*. But in the case of *The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, theatrical practice becomes literary criticism. Not just informs, but actually becomes. Most obviously in that a pantomime clown is regarded as the greatest Shakespeare editor of his time. Less perceptibly, but more powerfully, the immemorial habit of stage clowns to speak more than is set down for them provides the unexpected opportunity for a beloved comic figure to utter surmises that, had they issued from more serious figures, would never have been countenanced. Theatrically astute readers in 1853 would have been prepared to find seriousness amidst the buffoonery of *The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, and for the expert reader the level of seriousness

verged on the shocking. Yet mixing the grave and the absurd is what clowns have always done. It's why we continue to be fascinated by them and why Hamlet was bothered by them. And so *The Grimaldi Shakspeare* provides a surprising instance of literary and theatrical practice folding in upon each other, like the successive twists and tumbles of a pantomime clown. It proves once more how right Hamlet was to be suspicious of clowns, not least because they are apt to behave in ways unbecoming a clown. As Grimaldi himself would have shouted over the footlights and the wild applause as he made his much-anticipated entrance in a Sadler's Wells pantomime, "Here we are again!"

Notes

¹Andrew Murphy is one of the few contemporary scholars to mention *The Grimaldi Shakspeare*. Although sympathetic to the work's satiric intent, he emphasizes its "charming silliness" rather than its pointed attack on Collier. Murphy, *Shakespeare in Print: A History and Chronology of Shakespeare Publishing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 197. Thirty years ago, Dewey Ganzel observed that *The Grimaldi Shakspeare* was the "most popular" of the "pamphlets criticizing the Perkins Folio," but then added that it was "not a serious attack." Ganzel, *Fortune and Men's Eyes: The Career of John Payne Collier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 169.

²John Payne Collier, "Early Manuscript Emendations of Shakespeare's Text," *Athenaeum*, 31 January 1852.

³John Payne Collier, *Notes and Emendations to the Text of Shakespeare's Play, from Early Manuscript Corrections in a Copy of the Folio, 1632, in the Possession of J. Payne Collier, Esq. F.S.A.* (London: Whittaker and Co., 1853), p. iii.

⁴Later scrutiny would reveal that the binding could be as late as 1750, in which case the signature would predate by about a century the surface on which it appears.

⁵The most detailed modern account of the Collier controversy is Arthur and Janet Ing Freeman, *John Payne Collier: Scholarship and Forgery in the Nineteenth Century* 2 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

⁶Collier, *Notes and Emendations*, pp. iii, iv. The initial print run of 1,400 sold out in a few months—spurred, perhaps, by favorable reviews in the *Athenaeum* and the *Literary Gazette*—with a second edition published in June that same year.

⁷Collier, *Notes and Emendations*, pp. xv–xvi.

⁸Collier, *Notes and Emendations*, pp. ix–x.

⁹Collier, *Notes and Emendations*, pp. xxv–xxvi.

¹⁰*Athenaeum* 2 April 1853.

¹¹Samuel Weller Singer, *The Text of Shakespeare Vindicated from the Interpolations and Corruptions Advocated by John Payne Collier, Esq . . .* (London: William Pickering, 1853) and Alexander Dyce, *A Few Notes on Shakespeare; with Occasional*

Remarks on the Emendations of the Manuscript-Corrector in Mr. Collier's Copy of the Folio 1632 (London: John Russell Smith, 1853).

¹²The first critic to accuse Collier of blatant deceit was A. E. Brae, in *Literary Cookery with Reference to Matter Attributed to Coleridge and Shakespeare* . . . (London: John Russell Smith, 1855). Condemning the Perkins Folio for its "wretched libels on the text of Shakespeare", Brae, writing pseudonymously as "A Detective", urged that "if the scent now opened be effectively followed up, it may, perhaps, at length extort a second confession, similar to Ireland's of Shakespearean forgeries" (p. 7). Believing that he had been libeled, Collier sued, stating in an affidavit that he had not "inserted a single word, stop, sign, note, correction, alteration, or emendation of the said original text of Shakespeare, which is not a faithful copy of the said original manuscript, and which I do not believe to have been written, as aforesaid, not long after the publication of the said folio copy of the year 1632". Quoted in Clement Mansfield Ingleby, *A Complete View of the Shakspeare Controversy, Concerning the Authenticity and Genuineness of Manuscript Matter Affecting the Works and Biography of Shakspeare, Published by Mr. J. Payne Collier as the Fruits of His Researches* (London: Nattali and Bond, 1861), pp. 39–40.

¹³17 June 1859; quoted in Ganzel, *Fortune and Men's Eyes*, p. 228. Ganzel's work was subjected to harsh scholarly judgement for being an apology for Collier and advancing the strange thesis that he was not, in fact, a forger.

¹⁴N.E.S.A. Hamilton, *An Inquiry into the Genuineness of the Manuscript Corrections in Mr. J. Payne Collier's Annotated Shakspeare, Folio, 1632; and of Certain Shaksperian Documents Likewise Published by Mr. Collier* (London: Richard Bentley, 1860), pp. 71, 19–20.

¹⁵Ingleby, *Complete View*, p. 324. Despite his pivotal role in the Collier controversy, Ingleby is best remembered not for his part in the Collier controversy but for compiling the first *Shakespeare Allusion Book* (1874).

¹⁶*The Grimaldi Shakspeare. Notes and Emendations on the Plays of Shakspeare, from a Recently-Discovered Annotated Copy by the late Joseph Grimaldi, Esq., Comedian* (London: J. Russell Smith, 1853).

¹⁷The description "grim old" is intended, of course, to echo "Grimaldi."

¹⁸*The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, p. 3.

¹⁹*The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, pp. 12, 3.

²⁰*The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, pp. 3–4.

²¹*The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, p. 13.

²²Collier, *Notes and Emendations*, pp. xxv–xxvi.

²³See, for example, "Anecdotes," *Boston Weekly Magazine*, 1 October 1803, p. 199. "A player in Richard III who had nothing to repeat but that passage, 'my lord, stand back, and let the coffin pass,' when he came to say it, said 'my lord stand back, and let the parson cough.'" The green room joke had staying power, as confirmed by its embellished appearance in a late-nineteenth century theatrical memoir as a "thrice-told tale." James E. Murdoch, *The Stage; or Recollections of*

Actors and Acting from an Experience of Fifty Years (Philadelphia: J.M. Stoddart, 1880), pp. 411–12.

²⁴*The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, p. 5.

²⁵*The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, p. 7.

²⁶*The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, p. 8. Clearly the parodist was aware of the critical tradition, as cited by Steevens, holding that Hamlet was first played by John Lowin, who also played the corpulent roles of Falstaff and Henry VIII. Thus, Steevens explains the conjecture that Gertrude's description of "fat" Hamlet was Shakespeare's way of apologizing to Elizabeth I for the "want of such elegance of person as an audience might expect to meet with in the representative of the youthful Prince of Denmark," described elsewhere by Ophelia as "the glass of fashion." *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare* (London: H. Baldwin, 1790), 9: 419.

²⁷*The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, note, p. 4; Peter Cunningham, review of *The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, *Athenaeum* 20 August 1853.

²⁸*Athenaeum* 20 August 1853.

²⁹*Athenaeum* 20 August 1853.

³⁰John Poole, *Hamlet Travestie* (London: J.M. Richardson, 1810), p. viii.

³¹*Hamlet Travestie*, p. ix.

³²The year when *The Grimaldi Shakspeare* was published witnessed a record setting six Shakespeare burlesques performed in London. The most popular was Francis Talfourd's *Shylock; or, The Merchant of Venice Preserved* (Olympic Theatre), starring the comic genius Frederick Robson, universally hailed as the Victorian successor to the great Regency clown who once drew crowds at Drury Lane and Sadler's Wells.

³³Memories could be clear. "I have seen Grimaldi play Clown many times, and there are no doubt plenty of people alive who can say the same," Letter to *Notes and Queries*, 22 December 1866, p. 490. "Whenever you see a happy, broad-grinning, apple-faced old gentleman, full of jollity, and a gamboller with children, be sure that he lived in the days of Grimaldi, and also considers it a blessing that he did so." "Reminiscences of Grimaldi," *Bentley's Miscellany* 19 (1846), p. 160.

³⁴*The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, p. 6.

³⁵Appropriately, theatrical lore has it that when Edmund Kean played Richard II he imitated Grimaldi's performance in the battle scene from *Lodoiska*. Henry Downes Miles, *The Life of Joseph Grimaldi; with Anecdotes of his Contemporaries* (London: Charles Harris, 1838), p. 46.

³⁶See Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 214–7. Except when he was performing at patent houses, Grimaldi was bound by licensing laws that prohibited the performance of scripted drama.

³⁷"Some Recollections of Grimaldi," *New Monthly Magazine* (July 1837) part 2, p. 383.

³⁸"Some Recollections of Grimaldi," p. 378.

³⁹Grimaldi's father, Giuseppe (the "Signor"), was engaged by Garrick to appear as Falstaff in the parade of Shakespearean characters through Stratford-upon-Avon planned for the 1769 Jubilee, but cancelled because of rain.

⁴⁰*Bizarre, for Fireside and Wayside*, 17 September 1853, p. 356.

⁴¹Miles, *Life of Joseph Grimaldi*, p. 4.

⁴²J.O. Halliwell, *Curiosities of Modern Shaksperian Criticism* (London: John Russell Smith, 1853), p. 16.

⁴³Cunningham, review of *The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, *Athenaeum* 20 August 1853.

⁴⁴Madden, diary 20 April 1860; W.O. Hunt to J.O. Halliwell, 23 August 1853, quoted in Freeman and Freeman, *John Payne Collier*, 1:609.

⁴⁵Halliwell rushed into print a pamphlet reflecting upon just one of the few emendations that Collier had made public: *A Few Remarks on the Emendation, 'Who Smothers Her with Painting,' in the Play of Cymbeline* (London: John Russell Smith, [March] 1852). In 1851 Halliwell had cast doubt upon the authenticity of the Ellesmere and Bridgewater manuscripts that Collier "discovered," but which were later revealed to be his own forgeries.

⁴⁶In the extensive correspondence between Fairholt and Halliwell, now in the Folger Shakespeare Library, there is not a single reference to Collier. Letters of J.O. Halliwell-Phillips 1841–1865, Folger C.b. 16.

⁴⁷"A.E.B.," *Notes and Queries*, 23 April 1853 and 21 May 1853.

⁴⁸"A.E.B.," "Shakspeare Readings, No. VIII." *Notes and Queries* 18 June 1853.

⁴⁹Brae to Ingleby, 9 May 1853, Folger W.b. 105 (2), Folger Shakespeare Library.

⁵⁰Brae to Ingleby, 24 May 1853, Folger W.b. 105 (5).

⁵¹*Notes and Queries* 2 July 1853.

⁵²Brae to Ingleby, 29 August 1853, Folger W.b. 105 (11).

⁵³Brae to Thoms, 20 August 1853, Huntington Ms HM 27855, quoted Freeman and Freeman, *John Payne Collier*, 1:633.

⁵⁴The full line in question, which has much puzzled commentators over the years, is spoken by Aufidius: "And power, unto itself most commendable,/ Hath not a tomb so evident as a chair/ To extol what it hath done" (*Coriolanus* 4.7.53–5). "However the main difficulty has arisen out of the word 'chair,' which the old corrector informs us should be *cheer*, in reference to the popular applause which usually follows great actions; and, by extolling what has been done, confounds the doer." Collier, *Notes and Emendations*, pp. 377–78. Collier was one of many commentators on this opaque and deeply disputed passage. It required twelve pages in the 1928 New Variorum edition for Horace Howard Furness to summarize the inconclusive critical debate. Steevens declared that "[t]he passage before us and the comments upon it [i.e., from Johnson, Warburton and Malone] are, to me at least, equally unintelligible" (p. 480), a pragmatic conclusion echoed by Halliwell: "Not having met with any criticism upon this passage in the least degree satisfactory, I leave it with the same remark as Steevens, and have nothing of my own to offer" (p. 485). Furness himself, after commenting on all the various readings, wearily pronounced that "no elucidator has materially bettered

that issued originally by Warburton nearly one hundred and eighty years ago" (p. 490). Warburton's view was that the "miserably ill expressed" line actually conveyed a common thought: that a powerful person loses stature by boasting (p. 479). *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare. The Tragedie of Coriolanus*, ed. Horace Howard Furness (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1928), pp. 479–490.

⁵⁵Brae to Ingleby, May 1859, Folger W.b.105 (32). Brae's test word was not publicly explained until 1859, in Ingleby, *The Shakspeare Fabrications; or, the MS. Notes of the Perkins Folio Show to Be of Recent Origin . . .* (London: John Russell Smith, 1859), p. 107. A fuller account appears in the same author's *Complete View*: "It struck Mr. Brae, upon reading the passage . . . that the word *cheer* was necessarily employed in a modern sense, and immediately undertook a close examination of the chronology of the words *cheer* and *cheers*, the result of which with some of the details he communicated to me. That result was that a *cheer*, in the sense of a *shout of applause*, was not in use till the present century, and that consequently it is a test-word which proves the manuscript notes of the Perkins Folio to be of recent origin. Nothing that has since been written upon the subject has in the slightest degree invalidated the soundness of this criticism" (pp. 150–51).

⁵⁶Thoms to Brae (draft) 2 September 1853, Huntington Ms HM 27862, quoted Freeman and Freeman, *John Payne Collier*, 1:632–33.

⁵⁷"When you have fully digested my *test-word*," Brae wrote to Ingleby, "and made some private researches of your own perhaps you would let me know whether you think it *conclusive*. If not so *to you*, who already have a predisposition in the same direction, I could not reasonably expect it to succeed with others." Brae to Ingleby, 7 September 1853, Folger W.B. 105 (7).

⁵⁸"[I]t is impossible I can trouble you any further," he wrote to Thoms, "upon a subject which to me is merely one of great literary interest," but which the editor insisted upon giving a "personal complexion." Of course Brae was also putting a "personal complexion" on the matter, as in his tongue-in-cheek assurance in the same letter that he "firmly and literally believe[d] every tittle of his [Collier's] account as to his acquisition of this folio." Brae to Thoms, 4 September 1853, Huntington Ms HM 27858; quoted Freeman and Freeman, *John Payne Collier*, 1:633.

⁵⁹*The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, p. 7.

⁶⁰*The Grimaldi Shakspeare*, p. 8.

⁶¹Brae to Ingleby, 9 May 1853, Folger W.b.105 (3).

⁶²Brae to Ingleby, 9 May 1853, Folger W.b. 105 (2).

